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ARMOIRE
FRENCH, PERIOD OF THE REGENCY

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AN ARMOIRE OF THE
REGENCY PERIOD

IT is hard for the student and lover of French decorative art to resist the temptation to say that the ornamental woodwork of the early eighteenth century is supreme in its field. It would be difficult indeed to refute this claim in the face of the numerous superb examples of both wall treatment and furniture yet in existence in their original situation. The Museum has recently been fortunate enough to acquire a splendid specimen of the workmanship of this period, remarkable not only in its preservation, but also in its somewhat unusual form.

The oak armoire, an illustration of which accompanies this article, dates probably from the first years of the Regency (1715-1723). This is true at least in point of style, though its actual execution may have been somewhat later.

One is struck at once by the architectural character of the piece. It is more the product of an architect than of a furniture designer, and it is therefore to the interior architecture of the time that one must go for parallel and comparison. Probably no other piece of furniture has lent itself more readily to an architectural interpretation than the armoire, since really it is only one degree removed from the built-in cupboard or closet, which may even use the same name.¹ According to Havard, these two classes of armoire had already become distinct by the fifteenth century, but apparently, except for a time during the sixteenth century, when the *armoire à deux corps* developed and a smaller scale was introduced, the architectural character of the movable type was never lost. This characteristic of the armoire is particularly in evidence in our example and is brought out even more strikingly when a comparison is made with the other movable furniture of the period, which under the *ébénistes* of the previous century, and still more so under Charles Cressent, had been growing less and less architectonic in character.

This armoire, we are led to believe, was probably built to harmonize with and com-

plete the interior treatment of a particular room. No documentary evidence has been forthcoming to prove this or even to suggest a definite provenance, and so we can only imagine what its original surroundings must have been. Considered by itself alone, however, the piece is a document of the greatest interest, as it illustrates clearly the changes that were taking place in design in the early years of the eighteenth century. With the exception, perhaps, of the crowning pediment, the heaviness that characterizes similar work of the previous century has entirely disappeared, and the entire design suggests a searching after a lightness and elegance which later developed into the rocaille license of Meissonnier. The insistence on the vertical line and the suppression of the horizontal are indicative of the change, but the simplicity and firmness of the design have been so well accented that the lack of the structural quality, which begins to show only a few years later, is nowhere in evidence.

In the eyes of the purist, there may be a lack of complete accord in scale and of just relation—as between the head of the door panels and the crowning member—but these are details which the transitional nature of the piece may well explain. To doubt the hand of a master on this score, is indeed out of place when we come to examine the design and execution of the details. Apart from its brilliant execution, the central ornament of the door panels is a masterpiece of design which will rank in every way with any of the work of Germain Boffrand at the Hotel Soubise, which it somewhat resembles. Unfortunately, the monogram J. M. A. in the roundel does not give us any help in unearthing the history of the piece, as the arms on the cartouche between the scrolls of the pediment yield, as yet, no clue to its ownership.

The perfect preservation of the piece enables us to see the jewel-like perfection of the carving, as on the day it was finished. No one but a brilliant and highly trained craftsman could have done such work, and although we can not name the author, it should not be less esteemed than if we could connect it with Boffrand or De Cotte. In striking contrast to the work of the present

¹ Monet. Dictionnaire.

day and of the late eighteenth century, the ornament is carved from the solid wood; the plain surfaces being set back to obtain the necessary relief. The skill and labor that this implies is enormous, especially in view of the extreme refinement and precision of the execution. In this connection, the superb handling of the various planes in the door panels should be noted, and particularly the convex surface of the monogram field, where the slightest technical slip would have spelt disaster. This particular detail exemplifies the increasing freedom with which earlier motives were being treated in connection with such Regency motives as the banded reed molding. But this freedom is kept in perfect control by sufficient emphasis on the simple framework of the design. It is the omission of this necessary emphasis which led to the excesses of the mid-eighteenth-century design.

The old steel lock and hinges are still in place and in perfect working order, which gives additional evidence of the care and esteem with which the piece has been treated since its completion. According to the customary arrangement, the armoire is assembled in eight main parts, consisting of the two wings of the door, the two sides with the corner pilasters, the hood, including its elaborate front, the bottom, and two sections of paneling forming the back. These parts are connected by steel pins, and are easily separable, enabling the piece to be moved through narrow doorways and packed for transportation.

To realize the superb qualities of design and craftsmanship that give such express

value to the piece, a first-hand examination is necessary, and it is hoped that every student and lover of such work will avail himself of the opportunity afforded by this recent acquisition, which is now on exhibition in Gallery J 11.

M. R. R.

A CRUCIFIXION BY PESELLINO

THE remarkable thing about the small Crucifixion attributed to Pesellino¹ which

the Museum has bought lately is the landscape background. The figures, though dignified and impressive, can not compare with the figures in the tiny picture of the same subject by this artist which the Kaiser Friedrich Museum in Berlin bought out of an English collection several years ago. The Christ in that panel is a masterly creation and the holy people have a solidity of form and an intensity of expression that the figures in ours can not approach. Our version is more youthful in workmanship and its only advantage over the other, which has a gold background, lies in the in-



DETAIL OF ARMOIRE

terest of the landscape.

Our panel shows its author's reliance on Fra Angelico, whose work it recalls in spirit, in color, and above all in the landscape. The attribution to Pesellino is vouched for by several authorities, chief among whom is Langton Douglas, the editor of the most recent edition of Crowe and Cavalcaselle's *History of Italian Painting*. Pesellino according to Wiesbach² came in direct contact with Fra Angelico,

¹Tempera on wood: H. 16½ in.; W. 11¼ in. Purchase, Marquand Fund, 1919.

²Francesco Pesellino, p. 37.

working as an assistant on the predelle of the San Marco and the Perugia altarpieces about the year 1440. The fact is not established, however, nor is it necessary in the explanation of the traits of the young painter that are due to Angelico's influence.

The most impressionable period of Pesellino's life fell at the time when the old mediaeval concepts were giving place to the naturalism of the fifteenth century and all the greater Florentine artists were then innovators. Fra Angelico himself, contrary to the old idea, is now recognized as one of the innovators. The innovation of his that was most prominent at the time of Pesellino's youth was in landscape. Berenson says that Fra Angelico is the first Italian to paint a landscape that can be identified; and more than that he appears to have been the first who remarked the part played by the atmosphere in the modification of the color of objects, the most important fact in the history of European landscape painting. The panels which Fra Angelico painted for the Annunciata in Florence (now in the Accademia) are examples of this effort after atmospheric effect, and these were the starting point for our picture.

The mediaeval conception of landscape still persists in our panel; it is not all founded on observation. The foreground is the gray, rocky ledge with crisp edges like split jelly that was inherited from Byzantine art.

But back of the formal foreground is real country with air between the beholder and it, such as one sees at twilight in Tuscany. There is a hill with pines and cypresses showing dark against farther shadowy hills and distant green-blue mountains lit up with the level evening light. The sky is luminous and opalescent at the horizon but higher up, back of the figure of Christ, are rain clouds of heavy blue. All except the foreground has been seen and set down much in the modern way, and this gives its peculiar interest to our little picture. Students of Italian painting will find an attraction also in that it shows one of the earliest glimpses into that mysterious, blue-peaked land that succeeding artists explored more deeply,

the consummate aspect of which is seen back of the Virgin of the Rocks and of Mona Lisa.

B. B.

TAPESTRIES IN THE SUMMER LOAN EXHIBITION

TWO important tapestries were added to the loan exhibition of laces and tapestries—which opened on June 16 and will continue until October 31—too late to be mentioned in the notice of the exhibition in the June number of the BULLETIN. We take this occasion, therefore, to call attention to these tapestries, lent by Lewis L. Clarke, and to offer some additional notes on the other tapestries in the exhibition.

Mr. Clarke's tapestries were woven at the famous French manufactory of Beauvais, under the direction of Philippe Behagle, who conducted the works between 1684 and 1705. They form part of a set of The Metamorphoses and illustrate the fables of Vertumnus and Pomona, and Pan and Syrinx. The name of Behagle appears on the selvage of the latter tapestry. The designer is thought to have been René Antoine Houasse (1645-1710), a French painter of repute, whose style shows the influence of Poussin and Le Brun. The splendid, rich colors of these tapestries remind one of the earlier weaves of the Gothic period, although in their drawing and composition, which reveal the classical taste of the time, nothing of the mediaeval tradition remains. Comparison with the Boucher tapestries in the exhibition will show the change which came in the eighteenth century, when more delicate color harmonies were preferred.

To the same period of the late seventeenth century belong three tapestries from a set of five owned by Mortimer L. Schiff. This set, known as the *Grotesques Chinois*, was one of the most successful woven at Beauvais, and certainly one of the most beautiful. The cartoons were furnished by the painter-decorator, Jean Berain, whose favorite arabesque designs, with their amusing combinations of fantastic architecture and human and animal forms, are notable in the history of orna-

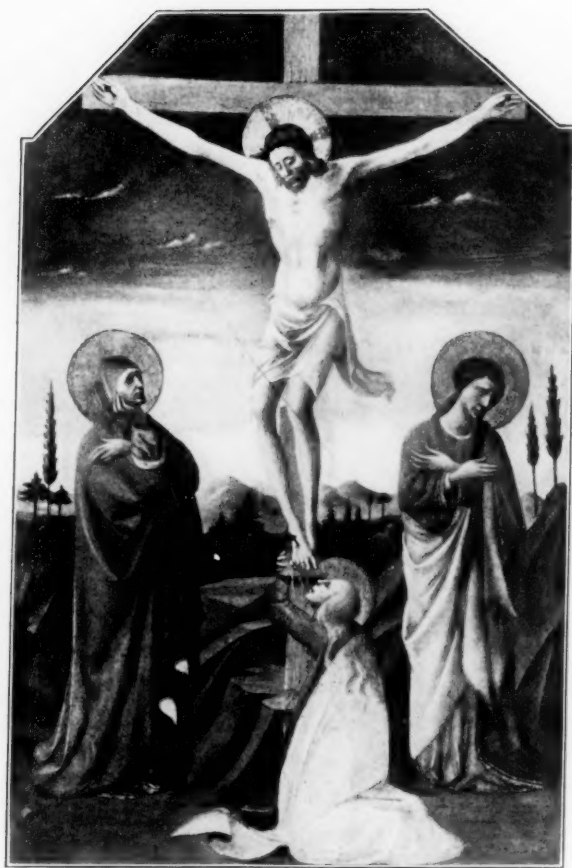
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CRUCIFIXION BY PESELLINO

ment. Here, again, a sumptuous effect is secured through the use of strong, pure colors. The golden yellow background is unusual, but highly effective.

Flemish tapestry weaving in the seventeenth century, a period vivified by the exuberant genius of Rubens, is illustrated by several examples. Two tapestries lent by Mrs. Arthur Curtiss James evidently formed part of a set relating to the story of Aeneas. In one, we see Aeneas with his ancient father Anchises fleeing from the sack of Troy; in the other, Aeneas and the beautiful Queen Dido of Carthage are setting forth on a hunting expedition. The predominating colors are green, yellow, and blue; the compositions show the "grand style" favored in this age of the baroque. A third tapestry lent by Mrs. James was formerly in the Ffoulke Collection, and represents Vertumnus and Pomona. It is an excellent example of Flemish weaving in the late seventeenth century.

The exceptionally fine, large tapestry lent by the Hon. William A. Clark, has for subject a classical theme, a queen driven in her chariot and escorted by soldiers, who bring with them captives and trophies of war. Does this scene represent Zenobia, Queen of Palmyra? If so, it is possible, perhaps, to identify this tapestry as one of a set designed in 1607 by the Flemish painter, Jan Snellinck (1544-1638), for the Oudenarde weaver, Joris Ghuys (1600-1620), and later repeated in smaller dimensions by Gerard Peemans. If this view is correct, the tapestry is a remarkable example of Flemish weaving in the first quarter of the seventeenth century. The border, with its naturalistic floral design, is especially beautiful. Although such architectural motives as cartouches and columns represented in full relief, came into favor in the seventeenth century for border designs, the earlier floral borders were still popular, and the fashion of imitating pictorial models had not as yet proceeded to the point reached in the eighteenth century, when the weavers imitated not only paintings, but their carved and gilded wooden frames.

A second tapestry lent by the Hon. William A. Clark brings us to the close

of the seventeenth century and the first years of the following. This is a decorative tapestry, rich in color, with allegorical figures representing Wisdom. It bears the city mark of Brussels and the name of the weaver, Albert Auwercx, who flourished at Brussels in the second half of the seventeenth century and in the first part of the eighteenth, as we find his name recorded among the master-weavers in 1707.

The success of the Beauvais manufactory in the eighteenth century was due in large measure to the cartoons furnished the weavers by the celebrated French painter, François Boucher. Thoroughly imbued with the joyous spirit of this age of graceful frivolities, Boucher's style, despite its artificiality, was one of exquisite charm. To reproduce the subtle gradations of tone, the tender colors, and the elaborate compositions of the paintings which Boucher executed for the looms of Beauvais, and later for the Gobelins, taxed to the full the technical resources of the weaver's craft. How successfully this translation was accomplished may be seen in the beautiful tapestry lent by Jules S. Bache, one of the famous set of the *Fêtes Italiennes* designed by Boucher. The set comprised in all fourteen pieces. Mr. Bache's tapestry represents *The Quack Doctor* and *The Peep Show*; that is, it combines in one piece, as was sometimes done, two cartoons from the set. It is signed with the reversed signature of F Boucher, 1736.

Equally charming is the second Boucher in the exhibition, a delightful tapestry of *The Dance*, lent by Mrs. W. Bayard Cutting, in which dainty youths and maidens are shown dancing in a forest glade. The tapestry bears Boucher's reversed signature and the date 1756. To appreciate fully the merit of these Boucher tapestries, they should be considered not as independent works of art, but as part of a decorative ensemble, in which the tapestries, the gaily painted and gilded woodwork, the furniture, often upholstered with tapestry in the same graceful style as the wall hangings, and many other arts of decoration contributed their share to the harmonious embellishment of the room. Another type of tapestry, developed in the eighteenth

century, confined the pictorial element to medallions set against a patterned background enlivened by garlands of flowers and other decorative devices. Of this type, which Boucher brought to its highest perfection, we have in the exhibition two attractive tapestries lent by Mrs. Frederick H. Allen. These pieces were formerly on exhibition in the room of European porcelains in Wing H, where two more tapestries of the set still remain. J. B.

AN AMERICAN FANION AND ITS DECORATIONS

IN Gallery H 7, in a case which exhibits types of helmets and body defenses used during the Great War, there has just been placed on view a small flag, or fanion (Fig. 1), which possesses not a little sentimental interest. It was the official emblem of the first American organization which went to the front and the only one to remain under fire throughout the war. This was the American Ambulance Corps which attracted volunteers from all parts of our country, and which was, of course, transferred to the service of our government (under the title S. S. U. 5-646) so soon as the United States entered the struggle. Throughout years of suffering this American unit stuck grimly to its task. It took part in every great French engagement and many of its men were buried on the field. Its flag, which is the present one, was honored whenever it appeared:¹ it bears, in fact, no less than six Croix de Guerre which were pinned to it by Marshal Petain and Generals Maistre and Bruissaud, and it is decorated with two of the highly prized shoulder knots or *fourragères*, which were affixed to it by Marshals Foch and Petain.

It is about the *fourragères* that something may be said; for they concern, we believe, a detail in the wearing of armor—in spite of a differing tradition as to their origin. This tradition, repeated by French officers to Stephen H. P. Pell (who as the last member of the ambulance in service deposited the flag with the Museum), is as follows: Centuries ago the soldiers of a

certain company, having mutinied, were to be hanged, but before their sentence could be carried out an attack developed and the condemned men were called upon to aid in the defense. They went into action, so to say, with halters¹ around their necks. These men, it is stated, fought with supreme bravery: hence in the end they received the praise of their general and, better than this, a free pardon. Moreover, each man was permitted to wear as a badge of honor a knotted cord around his shoulder as a token of past suffering and as a



FIG. 1. FANION OF THE AMERICAN AMBULANCE NO. 5-646 S. S. U. SHOWING CROIX DE GUERRE AND FOURRAGÈRES ATTACHED

badge of heroism. The same tradition states that from that time onward *fourragères* were always treasured in the French Army as a detail of military costume, granted to those only whose valor had shone under conditions of great privation and distress.

The *fourragère*, in a word, has an interesting traditional history. And this should be accepted gladly even by a Curator of Armor (who, for the rest, is apt to be of an unbelieving and unregenerate race). It is only fair to add, however, that the origin of the *fourragère* can be explained in a more consecutive and in even as honorable a way if we examine ancient pictures and by means of them trace the changes

¹ "Foraging cords," used for tying up bundles of forage, or for tethering horses = *fourragères*.

which this "structure" underwent at different periods; for thus it becomes clear that the shoulder cords in question can be traced back to simpler conditions until they appear merely as "arming points," or metal-tipped laces, which served to



FIG. 2



FIG. 3



FIG. 4

"truss up" or bear the weight of a particular part of a soldier's equipment, in days when laces were used largely instead of buttons. Let us, for example, refer to three stages to indicate how the modern *fourragère* has developed in complexity from the simple



FIG. 5



FIG. 6

shoulder lace of several centuries ago. In Fig. 2 the shoulder lace appears in its early form (sixteenth century); in Fig. 3 (late seventeenth century) it has become longer, so that it is worn looped up, its metal tip having also grown in length; in Fig. 4, which is the modern *fourragère*, it has grown much longer—to such a degree

that its "free end" has become braided and coiled extensively; indeed, the loop itself has grown so long that it is attached below so as to keep the cords together. Moreover, the metal tip of the lacing has also increased in size and is now a conspicuous and ornamental affair, no longer capable of being used as the tip of a lacing to be passed through an eyelet of small diameter. In all the cases figured above, the lacing is ornamental in color and texture; in fact, one of the reasons which caused it to survive in the soldier's equipment was doubtless its attractive color and its bright metal tip; for, assuredly, since the middle of the seventeenth century it had become a "rudimentary organ," as



FIG. 7



FIG. 8



FIG. 9

an anatomist would call it, in the sense that, although it survived, still it had lost its early usefulness.

Its original purpose becomes clear if we examine ancient "documents." Thus we find that instead of appearing on one shoulder only, it was earlier present on both. Moreover, it there appeared in pairs, rather than singly; in fact, it retains its doubled condition in the *aiguillette* of the modern officer—an ornamental shoulder cord which is closely related to the *fourragère*. The simplest stage of the shoulder cord (fifteenth and sixteenth centuries) is illustrated in Fig. 5, in a portrait of a "Navigator" in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford¹; a later stage is shown in Fig. 10, the Harcourt portrait (1667), where the laces are long and are

¹Cf. Ffoulke, *The Armourer and his Craft*, Methuen, London, 1912, p. 108.

looped up. In Fig. 6, we see the original function of our laces—to hold up the armor for the arms—two laces being better than one for the purpose since they are more easily tied and are less apt to permit the armor to rotate out of place. We picture here the Duc de Nevers portrait in Hampton Court. We find further information in the matter if we examine pieces of armor and note that they often show a pair of holes in the upper element of the arm through which our laces were passed, Fig. 7. Sometimes these holes are furnished with brass eyelets to protect the laces from fraying, Fig. 8. Again, where the upper plate itself is not perforated, it has a leather border riveted to it which in its turn is provided with eyelets, Fig. 9.

Now it is significant that the shoulder cords are longest in the latest portrait shown (Fig. 10): by that time (1667) they had already entered upon a path of development which was foreign to their original use—for in the earlier condition they were certainly long enough to serve their purpose in tying up the weight of the armor and in leaving length enough at the tips of the laces for tying a bowknot comfortably. And, thanks to the stage shown in Figure 10, we have now the necessary proof that the shoulder cords persisted in use at a period when armor for the arms was very rarely worn, and then only in ceremonial costume by the highest officers. In a word, we here observe that the cords are undergoing a change of a particular kind which the zoölogist illustrates, under the "principle of the change of function," in such instances as when the gill-aperture of a water-breathing vertebrate becomes the ear-hole of a lizard or mammal, or when the pointed limy scale of a fish becomes from its position on the edge of the mouth the progenitor of teeth. Hence we are now able to show that in the late seventeenth century shoulder cords or laces were losing their usefulness as "arming points" and were becoming mere ornaments or "recognition marks," enabling their wearer to be distinguished as high in the order of military dignity. Therefore it is not remarkable that they should be coveted by a lower officer or an enlisted man, and

that they should finally come to be granted him, with added color and glitter, as a reward for distinguished service.

But how, one will ask, could the tradition noted above as to the origin of the *fourragère*, come into being, if it were not true? Here a Curator of Armor would shrug his shoulders, and declare that the story is vague, lacks dates, names, and place: he might add that if the tradition were true



FIG. 10. PORTRAIT (1667) OF COUNT HENRI DE LORRAINE (HARCOURT) SHOWING SHOULDER LACES

it meant merely a particular application of the principle that shoulder cords were already in use as badges of honor and that they were coveted by common soldiers even when they were about to be hanged! Then how again, one will insist, could so excellent a name as "*fourragère*" be used for the shoulder knots, if the structure in question had never been a forage-cord? Here again the answer is simple. Soldiers are known to devise amusing or figurative names for everything about them. We have only to think of the curious vocabulary which has grown up out of the trenches of the Great War to recall how true this is

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For special privileges extended to teachers, pupils, and art students; and for use of the Library, classrooms, study rooms, collection of lantern slides, and Museum collections, see special leaflet.

Requests for permits to copy and to photograph in the Museum should be addressed to the Secretary. No permits are necessary for sketching and for taking snapshots with hand cameras. Permits are issued for all days except Saturday afternoons, Sundays, and legal holidays. For further information, see special leaflet.

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